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**Lost Pines**

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**Lost Pines**

**by**

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**Report**

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## **Dedication**

For the residents of Bastrop, Texas who were affected by the wildfire.

And for the kids.



## **Acknowledgements**

Stuart Kelban for showing me what a good story looks like. Zach Gonzalez-Landis for listening to the worst ideas in the world and keeping a smile. Patrick Smith, Sarah Kolb, Evan Roberts, and the rest of my crew for staying up all night for eight days in the woods in the cold. Jordan Kerfeld, for spending more time on the film than anyone else, and staying loyal. Tomo Nakayama for haunting my dreams with an unbelievable score. Alan Pakula and Chris Carter for inspiring me in the first place. And Aya Burgess for her unwavering emotional support despite all the madness.

## **Abstract**

## **Lost Pines**

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2013

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This report summarizes the script development, pre-production, production, and post-production stages of making the short film *Lost Pines*. The short was produced as my graduate thesis film in the Department of Radio-Television-Film at The University of Texas at Austin in partial fulfillment of my Master of Fine Arts degree in Film Production.

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## INTRODUCTION

One day during my first year in the program, I remember enthusiastically gushing about the film *The Parallax View* to my friend and classmate Evan Roberts. It was the capstone to a whole discussion of my favorite '70s thriller films. He told me he didn't understand why I was making comedies if I loved thrillers so much, and I joked I'd show him by making a '70s thriller for my thesis film. It started off a joke, but the more I thought about it, the more I liked the idea.

There are so many thrillers from that period that I love, including *All the President's Men*, *3 Days of the Condor*, and *The Conversation*, and many others. It was a great era for detectives in cinema. I was also interested in exploring a genre piece. While *Lost Pines* could potentially be considered a character drama, I always conceived of it as a detective thriller, and I wanted to have fun with the rules of detective films and play around in the genre sandbox for a while.

My imagination started with these films, but the final project had a style of its own. While *Lost Pines* is updated to a modern perspective, and very much a film about the modern era, it was influenced by the look and visuals of '70s thrillers with their vast locations, shadowy characters, and dark underbellies, and the conventions of the detective thriller genre with its smart, sleuthy protagonist in over her head.

## **SCRIPT DEVELOPMENT**

### **FINDING THE STORY**

The script development stage is very important to me as a writer. I wanted to make sure the script was structurally sound before I started pre-production, so I began the outlining process in early June 2012, and gave myself the summer to find a story I loved enough to make.

I wanted my story to match two criteria: 1) I hadn't seen something like it before, and 2) if someone else made it, I would absolutely love it. I started to get serious about thinking about films I loved. Early on, I knew I wanted to try to make a detective thriller. I've always had a passion for thrillers -- or, as my girlfriend Aya calls them, "guys running around movies" -- but I had an idea for a thriller that might actually appeal to Aya. A smart, emotional teenage lesbian detective thriller felt like something I hadn't seen before and definitely felt like something I would love to see.

### **THE SETTING**

In searching for an appropriate setting for my story, I began thinking about the small towns surrounding Austin. I grew up in a very small town on the Oregon coast -- an experience that defined me for many years. Small towns have a specific quality that cinema sometimes romanticizes. I wasn't interested in romanticizing my setting, but I also wasn't interested in demonizing it, even in regards to the gay subject matter. I wanted a setting with all the boredom and staleness that small towns can sometimes be host to, as well as the darkness and crime that can exist around the corner.

Bastrop immediately floated to the top of potential locations. A small town of just over 5,000 people, Bastrop was ground zero for a 2011 wildfire disaster that swept through, destroying many homes, forcing evacuations, and demolishing a majority of the

Lost Pines Forest. Fire and destruction were the ideal setting for a thriller. Not only that, but the rebuilding and recovery that were happening in Bastrop in the wake of wildfire also provided great inspiration for stories and characters. Smoke, ash, and burnt trees were the perfect setting for intrigue and action.

Bastrop offered the conflicting dynamic of a tight-knit community that had the potential for terrible crime. I began to conceive of a story built around and after the Bastrop wildfire.

### **POST-CLOSET FILMS**

In July of 2012, as I was still in the process of outlining potential stories, I had the fortune to attend the Outfest Film Festival in Los Angeles, one of the largest LGBT Film Festivals in the country. At that festival, I met a slew of other gay filmmakers, and took advantage of the screenings to watch as many films as possible. What came out of that experience was a sense that I wasn't seeing a lot of films in contemporary gay cinema that seemed to capture my experiences. I never had a particularly traumatic coming out story, or experienced extreme prejudice or bullying like in *Brokeback Mountain*, or, say, *But, I'm a Cheerleader*. I don't live a flashy lesbian lifestyle, going to clubs and hooking up on weekends like the women in *The L Word*. In fact -- are you sitting down? -- entire *days* go by where I forget altogether I'm even gay. If you asked my friends to describe me in five words, I would hope that "funny" and "smart," make the cut before "lesbian" does.

That said, I do think there's a place for gay films that deal with gay stories like mine -- where being gay is just a fact and not the central focus. In talking to friends about it, we developed a term for this idea: "post-closet" filmmaking. I wanted my characters to be gay without using their sexual orientation as the conflict of the story. I

wanted gay characters where their gayness was a passing reference, not a revelation. In fact, was it possible to make a movie with gay characters that never even mentioned the word “gay”? I wanted to try. Watching the films at Outfest made me realize that contemporary gay cinema is responding to a homophobic world, not the increasingly accepting world that I experience on a daily basis. If in the future this sounds anachronistic, it can only be a good thing.

### **WRITING THE SCRIPT**

As a social person, I knew that I needed external pressures to finish my script on time. I created a writers’ group over the summer to help set deadlines for myself, with an elaborate reward system involving happy hour margaritas for finishing my work. With the help of my fellow writers, I made it through multiple drafts of my script. I also consulted with my friend Zach Gonzalez-Landis via Google Chat online, who read countless drafts those first few months and helped me find my footing at a time when the possibilities for the story felt potentially limitless. I would have been lost without his steady hand helping me find a path through the forest of new ideas.

I used those first several drafts to focus on finding my story. I spent a lot of time honing in on a believable mystery for my detective to solve within the time constraints of a short film, but would still be satisfying to watch. I was worried people were used to seeing mysteries on TV dramas -- episodes of *Law and Order* that took 42 minutes or more to play out. I didn’t have time in the short film format for multiple red herrings or elaborate clues. I focused time on developing a convincing drug dealing villain with a Oxycontin ring my protagonist could uncover.

When I finally sent a draft of the script to my thesis advisor, Stuart Kelban, he called me out on spending my time on the wrong thing. The most important aspect of my



story was not the intrigue surrounding the drug dealers and suppliers, but the relationship between my two main characters, Stef and Faith. That relationship was thin and lacking in my first few drafts. I had spent too much time coming up with incredible foot chase sequences and not enough time on the emotional core of the film. Of course, his advice was right on, and I went back to begin writing a new version that focused on the relationship.

In the first few drafts of the film, Faith was missing until the very end, when Stef found her drugged and unconscious inside a drug trailer. This began to change as I spent time developing their relationship. I added a scene in the middle of the film where they meet to discuss the drugs and their relationship. From the moment I wrote it, it was clear that it would be the tentpole scene of the film. Writing the two teenagers together was an “aha” moment, when I finally began to see what the film could be. I changed the opening of the film to a scene of Stef and Faith hanging out pre-wildfire, to establish their relationship before Stef was sent away to juvenile detention. Finally, the ending evolved so that Faith was no longer unconscious in the trailer, but awake and alert and a key player in the climax. It all seems so self-evident in retrospect, but at the time, each one of those changes was a revelation.

## **PRE-PRODUCTION**

### **TIMELINE**

I knew I wanted to graduate from UT on time at the end of the spring semester in 2013. In order to make that happen, I had to shoot during Winter Break. I knew from my experience on my pre-thesis film that pre-production becomes significantly more challenging once classes start. So, I started pre-production in August 2012 with the intention of putting together my core team before the semester began.

It was important to me to give myself enough pre-production time for my thesis because I felt that I had cheated myself out of pre-production on my pre-thesis. On that project, I had been eager to shoot out early in the semester in order to have ample time to focus on the feature film I was writing in my screenwriting class. I knew that the two projects would battle for my time, and I wanted to do a good job on both, so I decided shooting early would be best. As a result, I think my pre-thesis film suffered from insufficient preparation, particularly in the areas of production design, prop design and extras casting.

In order to do better for my thesis, I intentionally took classes fall semester that I knew would not distract me from my thesis, and I started the pre-production schedule as early as possible. The first step was finding my core team.

### **FINDING THE TEAM**

My first step was to find a director of photography. I had my eye on Patrick Smith. I had worked on projects on which he was the DP, including Evan Roberts' pre-thesis, *Yeah, Kowalski!*, and a few commercial projects. But the film that convinced me that Patrick was the right DP for *Lost Pines* was Nathan Efstation's pre-thesis film, *Comes a Time*. I worked as an assistant camera for Patrick, and I loved the way he

captured rural Texas for that film, and his confidence with light and shadow. When Nathan screened *Comes a Time*, I was blown away by the final images, and while the genre of his film was different from *Lost Pines*, I felt that I could adapt the visual style that they created for my project.

When I approached Patrick about the film, he said yes before even reading the script. I emailed him the script and insisted he read it before getting back to me. After reading it, he emailed me back immediately with ideas that came to mind. He sent me a link to some footage he had shot over the summer where he used a steadicam as he sprinted through a recently burned forest, giving the impression that we were floating through the woods. I loved the footage, and it launched a conversation between us about the visual look of the film, which I will discuss further on in this chapter.

My next step was to find a producer who would be passionate about the project and who I could trust. For this, I knew I would have to wait for classes to start. The first week of classes, I asked the advanced producing professor, John Pierson, if I could pitch my film to his class to see if anyone was interested in taking it on. As it turned out, I got responses from four producers after my pitch. I sat down with each of them individually to gauge their interest and experience, and most importantly, how well we got along together.

In my pre-thesis and 881KB films, I had produced my own films. I knew I wanted a Producer for *Lost Pines* to take over the logistics and planning to free up my time to focus on the creative aspects of filmmaking. But this being my first experience with a producer, I knew that it would be hard for me to hand over this highly personal project I was very passionate about, to another person. It had to be the right person.

After interviewing the four producers, I selected Sarah Kolb to be the lead producer. Of the four, she was the one who stood out to me as the most experienced,

having organized the popular music event West by West Campus for three years. On a personal level, I found her to be fun and likeable, and she laughed at my jokes, which is a quality in a person that cannot be underestimated. I offered co-producer positions to the other three interested people and everyone accepted. I had my producer team.

Finally, I needed a production designer. I reached out to my friends for suggestions, and Kelly Ota came back with a whole-hearted recommendation: Claire White. I sent Claire the script, and when we met the first time, she had printed out the script and written questions all over it. I knew the moment she pulled out that script that she was going to be dedicated to the production. I was even more excited when it came out that she had grown up in Eugene, Oregon, just a few hours away from my hometown. She knew just what I was talking about when I started going on about pine trees and overcast skies -- key elements to the visual scheme of *Lost Pines*.

### **THE VISUALS OF *LOST PINES***

The first visual references I brought to *Lost Pines* were from my favorite thrillers from the 1970s. Specifically, *The Parallax View* and *All the President's Men* were major influences, but I was also interested in the visuals of *Jaws*, *Marathon Man*, and *The Conversation*. *Lost Pines* isn't a period piece, though, so I also wanted some modern touchstones. I watched other teenage detective movies like *Brick* and *Winter's Bone* to get a feel for how they treated the subject. I took inspiration from both of those films. Finally, I had spent the summer obsessively watching the TV show *Justified*, and the look of that show became another major influence. I also examined the movie *Gone, Baby, Gone* for ideas -- it wasn't a rural film, but the tight-knit neighborhood of Boston that that film takes place in reminded me of my hometown. Finally, my lifelong love of *The X-Files* came up again and again when looking for visual references.

The first visual element I discussed with Patrick was using shadows, silhouettes, and darkness to create suspense and realistic night scenes. I didn't want my night scenes to look like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, where they have perfectly-lit scenes in which the light is simply tinted blue to give the impression that it's coming from the moon. *Buffy* can get away with that style because it's not rooted in realism, but I wanted *Lost Pines* to feel more authentic. I told Patrick that while it was definitely important to see the actors' faces and emotions, he shouldn't shy away from shadow and darkness. We looked at night scenes in *All the President's Men* for reference, where silhouette and shadow were used generously to add to the spooky suspense of the mystery of that film. I told him a story I'd heard about *The X-Files* Director Rob Bowman, who was famous for walking on set and turning off lights. Bowman wasn't afraid of shadow -- *The X-Files* can be a very dark show at times. I wanted to play around with shadows, too. (See Appendix C for stills from these films and comparisons to stills from *Lost Pines*.)

I also wanted to utilize the wide-open imagery of rural Texas. Many of these '70s thrillers use dramatic extreme wide shots to add atmosphere, and at times, increase tension. There's a scene in *The Parallax View* where Warren Beatty's character goes to a river dam to look for information. He's confronted there by a man who wants to kill him. The director cuts to an extreme wide shot as a way of saying, look there's all the space, and no one around to help him. Beatty is alone. *All the President's Men* uses similar extreme wide shots to show Woodward and Bernstein as tiny specks up against a monstrosity of a system that they can't possibly overcome. I wanted to show my main character Stef visually as someone who doesn't have backup or support, and is not a powerful figure in this world. We ended up using extreme wide shots in *Lost Pines* at the fireworks stand, the curb outside the football stadium, the burned down house, and the Lost Pines forest.

Patrick and I also talked a lot about what Cavell's drug trailer would look like. We examined a scene from *Jaws* in which Captain Quint tells Brody and Hooper the story of being on the *USS Indianapolis*, which sank, leaving the crew to be stalked by sharks for three days. It's an example of a tense scene in close quarters, which is exactly what my climax scene in the trailer would be. Patrick and I broke down the coverage of that scene, finding that there was actually a lot more coverage than initially appears. We also agreed that the lighting of the *Jaws* scene was a terrific reference point -- the light is motivated from a single practical bulb swinging above the table. The three men are not beautifully lit, but the stark shadows that move from the motion of the boat created terrific suspense for that scene. We talked about using a similar practical fixture inside the trailer, and swinging it during the fight scene to add tension.

Patrick and I talked a lot about the film *Brick* because it is also a high school detective thriller. *Brick* is a very stylish film, and completely different from *Lost Pines* tonally and technique-wise, but it shared some traits. Primarily, I was interested in looking at Brendan, the main character who was at once a high-schooler and on the outside of high school society. Early on, I decided I didn't want to show or mention Stef's parents in *Lost Pines*. Presumably she has them, but neither her parents, nor anyone else's parents are ever referred to. I didn't want the audience to be thinking about Stef's home life, and how that might have made her the person she is. Even though she's a teenager, I wanted to treat her like an adult. We never wonder where Warren Beatty's parents are during *The Parallax View*, and I don't want viewers wondering about Stef's parents, either. This is a technique *Brick* uses as well.

Additionally, *Brick* creates a sort of outsider perspective for Brendan that I wanted to use in *Lost Pines*. Stef comes out of the world of high school, but she's also apart from it, having spent the last six months in a juvenile detention facility. I wanted to

use the visuals of typical high school life, but show Stef on the outside of it. Much of this is done through the film's locations.

The locations are very much built around my own memories of vivid locations from my hometown Astoria, Oregon. The football field in Astoria is a place of pride and strength for the town, but it wouldn't be to Stef. I wanted to use the football field in *Lost Pines* as a place where Stef would be an outsider -- ultimately, she comes to the field, but she doesn't belong there. When she has the choice, she ends up under the bleachers, a place that feels more comfortable and safe.

I was also very interested in the image of the bus barn. Bus barns are inherently dramatic places. All the town's busses parked neatly in rows is an unusual sight, usually tucked out of the way. I wanted to use Bastrop's bus barn as another way to represent Stef's alienation from other teenagers her age. The school bus is a powerful symbol of public school, but Stef and Faith are at the bus barn at a time when other people aren't there, and they're using it in a way it's not meant to be used. This scene uses the imagery of high school, but I wanted to turn it upside down to show Stef as outside the system.

Astoria, Oregon, came up as a reference again and again in the pre-production process. Astoria is thousands of miles from Texas, and I wanted the film to be set in, and feel like, Texas. But Astoria has a quality that was part of the original inspiration for the film. I felt like I knew small towns from growing up in one, and in order to stay honest, I wanted to make sure I didn't stray from the experience I had as a teenager.

There are so many decisions to make every hour as a director that it can be easy to drift off track into a style that is different from what you originally set out to do. I had been on other sets and seen directors cave on their vision in little ways because of convenience, time, or even just confusion, and eventually veer off track so far they don't recognize what movie they're making anymore. It is easy to get overwhelmed with the

sheer number of decisions you need to keep making that you lose sight of the vision. I needed a guidepost to stick to, and I found myself comparing locations, production design, wardrobe, and everything else, to my own memories of being a teenager in Astoria. If I could picture that location, or that jacket, or those curtains, back home, it stayed, if not, it went. It was a nebulous guide stick, but it was helpful to have nonetheless. I knew I succeeded when, at one point during production, my boom operator, Nathan Duncan, stole a look into the monitor and exclaimed, “It looks like Oregon!” Bingo.

## CASTING

Casting is always challenging for me. When I have my writer hat on, it’s hard for me to see anyone as the character but the imaginary person in my head who I’ve been living with for months. Slowly, I’m getting better at casting by learning to take off my writer hat and put on my director hat. It’s still a challenge.

I knew from experience that open casting calls in Austin are hit-and-miss. I wanted a great cast for this film, so I started asking around and watching other local short and feature films to get a sense of the local talent. I also attended the Vanguard Theater annual Unified Auditions, in which around 50-60 actors audition at once for an auditorium full of local directors. I scheduled an open audition and pulled out my notes and headshots from the Unified Auditions and all past casting calls I’d attended, and started looking for people to invite to audition.

I was particularly concerned about finding my lead, Stef. In the script, Stef is 17 years old, and I was worried that in order to find an actor who was skilled enough to carry the film, she would have to be much older. I know television shows like *Glee* and *90210* get away with much older actors playing high school students, but I wanted a more



realistic feel for *Lost Pines*. I didn't want to try to fake a 25 year old as a 17 year old if she didn't look the part. On the other hand, Austin is not a huge city, so I knew I would be limited to the local talent pool unless I was willing to spend a few thousand dollars on a casting director from another city.

As luck would have it, I needn't worry about finding Stef. Unbelievably, the actor we ended up casting was the first one in the door during our open auditions. Raquel Watson blew us away in the audition with her youthful look and totally authentic gravitas. She became the actor we compared all the others to for the rest of the casting period. We held three weekends of auditions and two rounds of callbacks, and after all of it, Raquel was still very much the favorite of everyone who saw her.

I found the actors who played Officer Ellison and Heidi Jo from the Unified Auditions. I invited them to my auditions and they shone. Finding the actor to play Faith was a challenge because we had a lot of great actors coming in for that age range who also auditioned for Stef, but in callbacks, their chemistry with Raquel wasn't totally working. I reached out to some of my friends in the UT Theater and Dance department for suggestions. One of the names that came back to me was Olivia Applegate, a UT student. When she came in, I originally thought that she was too pretty to play Faith. I imagined Stef and Faith as outsiders, a little weird, a little off. But Faith is the one who undergoes a transformation in the film to become a more popular girl who falls in with the cool crowd and joins the lacrosse team. If one of them was going to be a knockout, it would make sense that it is Faith. And somehow, it makes her rejection of Stef at the burned down house feel even crueler. I wanted Olivia for the role.

Finally, I needed a Cavell. Cavell was a tricky role because the actor needed to be able to play a milquetoast high school band instructor as well as a violent, unhinged, drug dealer. The role had the potential to be fun and big, but I wanted to make sure it was not

so big as to feel unbelievable or arch. It was a delicate line, and I needed the right person to walk it. Fortunately, I found an actor who was terrifyingly good in his audition, but five days before shooting, he had a family emergency and called me in a panic saying he needed to drop out of the shoot. He was very sorry, and although my adrenaline rushed to my head, I told him it was fine, that we'd find someone else.

Finding an alternate actor for one of the most challenging roles in the film, with only a few days left before shooting, was the biggest crisis moment of the pre-production process. I emailed every director and actor I knew in Austin with the role description asking for suggestions. I got a dozen names, and I called them all. Most were too busy or out of town. I scheduled last-minute auditions for three actors, and from those, I found one, Todd Essary, who I thought might be able to pull off the role. With three days to spare, I went into rehearsals with him to prepare him for the demanding trailer scene and choreograph the fight scene. While part of me still wonders what could have been with my original actor, I'm completely happy with Todd's performance, and grateful I found someone as talented as him in such a short amount of time.

## PRODUCTION

### THE DAY BEFORE

The day before we were to begin shooting, we had our second major crisis. Our juvenile detention location dropped out; they hadn't realized they were double-booked for the following day. My producers, my assistant director Evan Roberts, and I began a mad scramble for another location that afternoon. After a couple hours of trying to nail down a sterile white room, I called my girlfriend, Aya Burgess, at work. I was tired, stressed-out and on the verge of having a major breakdown, and I needed someone to vent to. Aya listened calmly until I was done, and then politely suggested that I try the office next door to hers. The tenants had moved out, leaving behind a row of empty, white, cinderblock offices. I drove there immediately. The office would work great. Sarah and I picked the one that looked the best and called Claire to begin dressing the set immediately for our shoot the following morning.

I think that crisis actually helped our production. It was nice to be able to have our first day of production in Austin instead of Bastrop. It was easier and more familiar for everyone. This helped ease the crew onto set and build camaraderie without the stress of travel. And it was great to be so close to Aya's work, where we had a support system to work with the building management and to offer an extra layer of backup.

Although crises are never welcome so close to shooting, in many ways a kickstart of adrenaline can be a positive. There's a scene I love from *The West Wing* before President Bartlet's Presidential Debate, where sixty seconds before the debate is to begin live on national television, the First Lady cuts the President's carefully selected designer tie in half with a pair of scissors. As the President flies down the corridor toward the stage, Josh scrambles to take off his own tie, Sam straightens the President's collar, CJ

freaks out, and the First Lady tightens Josh's tie around the President's neck, saying "Game on, Boyfriend." Losing the juvenile detention facility location was *Lost Pines'* "Game on, Boyfriend" moment where everyone scrambled, the production team gelled, and solutions clicked into place. We made it work; we would make this whole shoot work.

### **LEARNING TO WORK WITH A PRODUCER**

Our first day of shooting in Bastrop was challenging. In particular, I confronted myself on my ability to delegate tasks to other people on this day. I was unused to having a producer and a strong assistant director on my sets. On my past films, I've produced my own work, and kept a close eye on my own schedule, so allowing other people to step in and do that for me on this shoot was a new experience.

At first, I wasn't good at letting them. I wanted to double-check everything my producer Sarah was doing -- was lunch coming on time, was there enough coffee for everyone, when were the extras going to be there, and on and on. Every time I asked, Sarah had an answer ready for me, and even better, she didn't complain that I was asking.

At lunchtime, I was sitting on the bleachers with Patrick going over the afternoon's shot list. I noticed a piece of trash catch the wind and drift across the football field. I told Patrick I wanted to go pick it up, but my feet were too tired to get up. At that moment, I saw Sarah run across the field, pick it up, and throw it away. Patrick and I looked at each other, both thinking the same thing -- Sarah was special, and I could trust her completely. After that moment, I tried to cede control of the logistics to her entirely. I should have done it even earlier, and on my next film, I hope to be more aware of my own micromanaging.

## **NIGHT SHOTS**

The next four days of shooting were night shoots. We started at the bus barn, then the trailer park where we shot the interior trailer scenes, then two nights in the Lost Pines forest. All four of those nights were incredibly cold. Physical production is subject to so many different unforeseeable conditions, and weather is one of them. Those nights were difficult for our crew. The temperatures dropped below freezing, as we worked in the forest, far from electricity or civilization, operating off generators for light. We made sure to provide hand warmers and hot coffee, and we had tote bags full of hats, gloves, scarves, and blankets for people who needed them. We kept at least one car running at all times with the heater on for our cast to sit in between takes. Unfortunately, our crew had to continue working no matter the temperature. The first night, I was woefully under prepared, and wrapped myself in a wool poncho. The next day, I stopped by the store before I went to set and bought myself a second set of long johns to wear under my clothes. I was much happier and a better director because of it.

It was hard for me not to feel guilty about the cold while we worked -- I felt responsible for everyone's happiness because it was my movie, and they were all volunteering to work on my project. Ultimately, though, I had to accept that I can't control the weather, and it wasn't my responsibility as director to make sure my crew was having a good time. I was there to make a movie, not play hostess at a party. I still struggle with the line between making a good movie and having a good time making it, and those cold nights in the forest tested my limits.

## **THE TRAILER SCENE**

The most challenging scene to shoot in the film was the climax scene inside the trailer. The first reason is the emotional intensity is at its peak. The scene begins with Stef telling Faith she loves her, which is a huge moment, but then when Cavell enters,

catching them together, we get a series of surprising reveals: he's the drug dealer Stef has been searching for, he's been having a relationship with Faith, and he has a gun and intends on killing Stef. Meanwhile, Faith learns that Stef is wearing a wire, and must betray Cavell and rescue Stef by shouting their location for Ellison to hear. Finally, the scene ends in a fight between Stef and Cavell. The scene has the difficult task of relaying a tremendous amount of information while still keeping its energy and maintaining its emotional intensity. I was worried as a director that it could come off as over the top or that Cavell would appear like a Bond villain or Stef seem superhuman in her ability to defeat him. I tried to remain objective about their performances throughout the night, keeping them believable and in step tonally with the rest of the film.

The second reason the scene was difficult to shoot was it took place inside a small, vintage 1960s travel trailer. We barely had enough space for the necessary action to take place with the actors, not to mention the boom operator, Patrick on camera, and I all needed to squeeze in somewhere. We sat our sound recordist outside the door because there wasn't enough room for her inside. Our AD was rendered essentially useless, as he was unable to monitor us from his position outside the trailer. It was tight and stuffy, but at least it was warm. Finding workable shots that didn't take on a dutch angle or accidentally catch the boom in the mirror was a significant challenge all night.

Additionally, the blocking for this scene was very complicated. The constantly changing blocking meant that there was a seemingly endless shotlist for the night. Every time the actors changed position, it added another set of shots. (We needed to shoot Stef position 1, Faith position 1, Cavell position 1, then Stef position 2 and so on.) Without our AD inside, Patrick and I were on our own to make sure we were covering all the action we needed. It wouldn't be for months later that I realized we didn't get as much

coverage as I needed, and I would have to rebuild this set on a sound stage in order to get the pickups I needed to make the scene work.

Finally, the fight scene was an enormous challenge. This is the first fight scene I'd filmed, and I was nervous about making it appear convincing. I worked with local fight choreographer Hector Gonzales to work out the blocking of the fight scene. He was also hugely important in figuring out my shotlist for the fight. He recommended that I cover the entire scene in a moving handheld wide and then each individual action in a close up. I didn't end up using every close up, but it was useful to have in the editing room. Hector and I talked at length about how the fight scene should feel in the film. I didn't want it to be a Jason Bourne action extravaganza. Stef isn't a trained fighter, nor is Cavell, and I wanted the fight, like the film, to be rooted in realism. Still, Stef had just been through a traumatic experience, so it would make sense if she needed to lash out beyond what was strictly required for her to escape. Hector and I decided on a short burst of quick actions that would leave Cavell incapacitated, but which an average person would be able to accomplish without martial arts training. My favorite moment in the fight comes after Stef slams Cavell upside the chin with a hammer, then spits the pills Cavell forced into her mouth back onto his unconscious body. It's a pump-your-fist-in-the-air moment. I wish I could remember who thought of that action and when, but I can't. The whole choreography experience felt so collaborative, I can't recall whose ideas were whose. That specific beat feels so natural and badass that every time I see that action play out onscreen, I want to cheer.

## **POST PRODUCTION**

### **WORKING WITH JORDAN**

Jordan Kerfeld contacted me early in the fall, after one of the readings of my script in PJ Raval's thesis class. He told me he loved the story, and he liked working with me, and asked if I had thought about using an editor for the project. He wanted the job. The truth is, at first, I hesitated. I wasn't sure I could give up control of my project to an editor -- the idea scared me. I talked to my friend Annie Silverstein about it, and she reminded me how many times I had complained about editing my own work during our pre-thesis films. She was right -- there are aspects of editing that I don't enjoy at all, and having an editor meant I could focus on the story without getting bogged down with the technical aspects of editing. I wanted a professional, and Jordan was enthusiastic about the project. I brought him on.

Jordan and I created a post-production schedule with dates for rough cuts and fine cuts leading up to my sound mix. Ultimately, we didn't adhere closely to that schedule, but it was useful initially to create one as a way of visualizing how much work we had to do and how much time we had to do it.

Next, we created a notes system for reviewing cuts and responding. We set up a mutual Dropbox folder where Jordan could upload low-res versions of rough cuts. I watched them on my laptop and responded on a Google Doc that we shared. The Google Doc had columns for scene, timecode, Britta's notes, and Jordan's response, and if necessary, Britta's response again. Those first few rounds of notes were extensive, with close to a hundred notes per round. We also talked in person about the cuts and on the telephone, but the specific notes always went through the Google Document. Ultimately, I think writing out the notes was beneficial to the project because I found myself getting



very specific about what I wanted to see and at what second that change should occur. If a cut felt wonky, I challenged myself to figure out why and offer constructive solutions. They weren't always the right solutions, but Jordan was also good about pushing back on notes he didn't agree with, or offering alternate solutions. It was also helpful to be able to scroll down the Google Doc and look at prior notes I had made. Essentially, we had a living chronicle of every change we made to the piece from the first rough cut to the fine cut. Many times, I went back to earlier cuts to remind myself what we had already done and what my response to it had been. It's easy to sink so deep into a project that you lose perspective, but having a log of my own thoughts helped ground me.

## **FEEDBACK**

I'm a big believer in feedback, but I've never liked to cast a broad net. Some of my peers like to fill an auditorium with people and have them all fill out comment cards. That works for them, but for me, it's the most miserable feedback process I could imagine. I like to know who my feedback is coming from, and I like to know it's someone who is on the same page as my project. If you're Michael Bay, you wouldn't ask Michael Haneke for feedback on the latest *Transformers* rough cut, and vice versa. With that said, I do think it's important to show your film to a variety of people -- if you're Michael Bay, you don't just want to show your film to Michael Bay superfans. There has to be a middle ground. With that in mind, I began targeting people for feedback.

The first person I showed a cut to was my girlfriend, Aya. She had a vague sense of the story from living with me during production, but she wasn't involved in production, and she hadn't read the script. In addition to that, she knew me and what kind of films I liked more than perhaps anyone. I specifically wanted to know what parts

of the story were confusing to a first-time viewer. She struck on three moments that would come up again and again in the feedback process -- first, she didn't understand that there was a wildfire happening in the opening scene; second, she didn't understand how Stef found the trailer at the end of the film; and third, she didn't put together that Cavell was the same guy in the trailer at the end as at the bus barn in the beginning, and on the football field in the middle. I brought the feedback back to Jordan and we began working on solutions.

We had many discussions about whether it was important to know about the wildfire at the beginning of the film. Technically, it wasn't critical information to understanding the film, but it added a texture to everything the characters did in those first few minutes of the film. We talked about using digital effects to put a forest fire in the background, but my concern is that it would feel fake and set up the wrong expectation of what kind of film this would be. We tabled the problem.

The second problem -- how does Stef find the trailer in the woods -- was an example of something that could be so clear on the page but very difficult to film. In the script, Stef finds burnt pine needles stuck in the bike's wheel well, and it leads her back to the burnt Lost Pines Forest. It turns out that burnt pine needles is just ash, and ash was not easy to read on camera. My production designer mocked up some burnt sticks covered in charcoal, and we stuck them in the wheel axle. It accomplished the same basic idea, but I was never happy with how overt they looked on camera -- too big and obvious of a clue, and on top of that, they *still* didn't get the idea across to the audience that Stef had to go to the burnt Lost Pines. Jordan and I were so unhappy with the whole section that we cut it from the film, and added a few ADR lines to explain how Stef gets to the trailer.

On the next round of feedback, I showed the cut to Stuart Kelban and my producer, Sarah Kolb. As two people who knew the script very well, they were able to tell me what they missed from the script and what wasn't reading as well as they thought it could. Stuart missed the burnt wood clue section, and explained to me something I already knew, but needed to hear again -- that moment in the film is more than just Stef finding a clue that takes her to the trailer, it's also the low point of the story. We need to see Stef spin out from the conversation she just had with Faith, and hit rock bottom. We need a moment to breathe and take in the weight of what Faith did to her before we head to the Lost Pines for the final climax. Stef nearly getting hit by a car and crashing her bike isn't just a physical low point, it's her emotional low point as well. Then, she finds the clue that leads her onward. No matter how much I was unhappy with how that clue played out onscreen, the film absolutely needed it. I put it back in, and in addition, at Stuart's suggestion, I added a voiceover callback to a prior conversation Stef and Faith had had to help the audience understand what the clue was and what it meant. It was overt, but the audience needed it.

Stuart's other major note was regarding the final trailer scene. He pointed out all the moments inside that trailer where he wished we were cutting to reaction shots of Stef or Faith, that weren't in the film. The reason they weren't in there was because we didn't have the coverage we needed. It simply wasn't in the footage. Then, he told me the last thing I wanted to hear -- I needed pickups.

I went back to Jordan to talk about the trailer scene and whether we could cut it another way to avoid pickups. No matter how we worked it, we couldn't get the scene to work. The coverage just wasn't there. That night in the trailer was so chaotic and difficult, we had simply missed getting the shots we needed. I talked to Sarah about going back to the trailer location, upon which she reminded me that during our night of

filming, we had damaged the trailer in a small way. We paid the owner for the damage and apologized for it, but she was afraid of more damage and unwilling to let us return to shoot our pickups. This scenario was only getting worse, but the more I watched the cut the more I couldn't imagine the film working without getting the pickups. Once the thought was planted, I couldn't unthink it. However we did it, it needed to be done.

While we worked on pickups, I continued to target people for more feedback. I sent cuts to Annie Silverstein and the rest of my thesis committee -- Ed Radtke and Mary Kearney. The notes that came back were the two big notes I was grappling with: the trailer scene, and how to show Bastrop was burning. Annie suggested the solution I ultimately went with -- open the film with a newscaster voiceover explaining the dire wildfire situation. It sounded a little heavy-handed at first, and maybe it is, but ultimately, I decided heavy-handed exposition was preferable to a confusing film. I recruited an actor friend to record the newscaster VO and plopped it in over the opening shots of trees. Immediately, the film had more suspense. What were these teenagers doing hanging out in a forest that was about to burn down? The molotov cocktail felt more justified, their carefree attitudes were easier to understand. So much of the film became clearer with the voiceover. It's still heavy-handed, but it works.

## **PICKUPS**

My production designer later told me she freaked out when she first received my email that we needed to recreate the travel trailer on a sound stage. It would be an enormous task if we needed the whole trailer, but I determined I needed five shots, which only required two setups, and two different walls of the trailer. They were close ups, so we'd only need the few square feet of space behind the actors' heads to match. The more we talked about it, the more realistic it started to feel. I was still nervous, though. I

talked to friends who told me about the most flagrant cheats they had ever pulled off in a film -- cheating one location for another location, cheating the head of one character for another, cheating shots filmed months later after actors had gotten haircuts, or lost weight. It seems everyone has a story of a pickup shot that shouldn't work that magically did. I took heart in their stories, but I still wasn't sure it would work in my case. I faked confidence in front of my cast and crew, but I was nervous.

Claire built an incredible set in Studio 4A out of spare wood and flats that resembled the travel trailer from the shoulders up. She built fake cabinets out of scrap wood, and molded aluminum foil with a credit card to look like the vintage pressed tin backsplash in the trailer. It was incredible what she did in one evening with about \$20 of supplies.

The next day, Raquel and Olivia showed up and I brought in a skeleton crew to shoot the five shots we needed. I knew it would take a lot of takes to get the actors to the same emotional intensity we had on the night we filmed. The geography wasn't quite the same as the trailer, so there was a lot of pretending they needed to do to -- for example, this chair represents the kitchen table, that piece of wood represents the refrigerator. Anytime you're cheating blocking, it's more difficult for the actors to get into the scene. Additionally, we didn't have Todd to come in to play Cavell, so I had my friend Nathan Efstation step in to read his lines and walk through his blocking.

I showed Raquel and Olivia the scene in the rough cut so they would remember how it felt that night. Todd's performance as Cavell is so creepy that watching it over and over between takes helped get the actors to the same emotional place as before. It also helped them remember exactly what happened in the movie before and after what we were shooting. It's easy to forget that I've been living with this project every day of the last six months, but the actors haven't seen a frame of it since we stopped shooting in

December. After four hours of shooting, I felt confident we had the reaction shots we needed, and *Lost Pines* wrapped for the last time.

When Jordan put the pickups into the cut it was like magic. Even though I had just watched the actors play the scene on a fake stage fifty miles away from the original, on screen, I already believed it was the same location. When I showed the cut to Aya, she couldn't even pick out which shots were the pickups. The reaction shots brought so much to the scene, just as Stuart had said they would. I can't imagine the scene working without them, and now I had my own story to tell people about a magical pickup.

## SCORE

Tomo Nakayama is an old friend of mine from when we both worked minimum wage at the Neptune Theater selling movie tickets in Seattle. He was in a band, I was making movies, and one day between showings, he told me if I ever needed someone to score a film, he was interested. I worked with him on my pre-thesis film, *Darling Memories*, and I was excited to work with him again on *Lost Pines*.

Talking about music in films has always been a challenge for me because I never hear it. I can't remember a time in my life when I have ever walked out of a movie and said, "Man, that was a great score!" But I know some of my classmates do think about music in that way, so I want to get better at it. I went back to some of my inspiration films to think about the music in them. Most of the '70s thrillers I referenced had music that was too strings-heavy to work for *Lost Pines*. The only exception was the marching band scene at the end of *The Parallax View*, which inspired the marching band sequence in *Lost Pines*.

I wanted a sparse sounding soundtrack with acoustic and slide guitar, evoking the rural landscape. We looked at Trent Reznor's Oscar-winning soundtracks for *Girl with*

*the Dragon Tattoo* and *The Social Network* and decided that electric guitar was not the right direction for our film. I also wanted to stay away from anything lush or orchestral, and Tomo agreed. I sent Tomo clips of music I liked from *Paris, Texas* and *Brokeback Mountain*. I also told him to check out the Bruce Springsteen album *Nebraska*, which had a quiet guitar-and-harmonica tone that I liked. I wanted to stay away from electronic sounds or more modern instrumentation.

Tomo and I set up our own Dropbox folder, where I would drop cuts of the film as soon as they came in from Jordan, and he would drop music tracks for me to listen to, give notes on, and share with Jordan. His first attempts at the opening theme music were right on for what I was going for. Quiet, haunting, even hummable. It reminded me of the theme to *Brokeback Mountain*, which I loved. But we ran into difficulty with music for later in the film, because the pace of the movie picks up, and I hadn't sent him music from any thriller films. We both struggled to figure out how the tone we created could work in a thriller setting.

I went back to YouTube and found clips from *Winter's Bone*, *Snow Angels*, and *Frozen River*, all rural, character-driven thrillers. Looking specifically at the most suspenseful moments in the film, we found a direction to go in that used the acoustic guitar to create tension, but didn't step over into the sweeping strings that I wanted to stay away from.

Tomo was great at coming up with ideas to show me, even when I didn't know quite what I wanted from him. I'm not a musician, so sometimes it's hard for me to talk specifics about instrumentation or time signatures or major/minor keys. We settled into a way of communicating where I would tell him what I wanted the music to feel like, and he would come up with ideas based on that. For example, I would tell him, "This scene needs to show how much life sucks for Stef, she's upset, reckless, doesn't give a shit."

Or, “This section needs to feel more urgent and dangerous, like something could happen at any moment.” Those kind of notes ultimately proved more helpful than trying to communicate with Tomo on a more technical level, and I think he appreciated that I was giving him the space to do his work without micronotes.



## MOVING FORWARD

I'm proud of this film. When I watch it, I still see things about it I want to change, but on the whole, I think it's my best film yet. I'm hopeful others will like the film as well, and *Lost Pines* will have a life in the film festival circuit.

While I think making *Lost Pines* has prepared me for the challenge of directing a feature, for the moment, I want to focus on television instead. I'm moving to Los Angeles this spring to work toward a career in writing for television. I hope to use *Lost Pines* as a launching pad to meet other filmmakers and writers through festivals. I'm also working on a pilot centered around a female private detective in North Dakota, with similar themes to *Lost Pines*. I'd like to continue to write in the thriller and crime drama genres.

While I still love directing narrative films, I look around at the entertainment landscape today and so much more of the stories I love are found in television than film. I'm crazy about shows like *Justified*, *Homeland*, *The Americans*, *The Killing*, *Sherlock*, and *Breaking Bad*, among others. In film, on the other hand, these kind of small-scale, character-driven crime dramas are hard to find funding for, much less an audience. While these shows put out new stories every week for years, the same concept pitched as a feature might never find its footing.

Additionally, I love the social aspect of television writing. I know myself enough to know I do better in a group environment than on my own. When I was writing *Lost Pines*, I created my own writers' group in order to get that social atmosphere that works for me. I love that television writers get that every single day.

No matter where I end up years from now, my experiences on *Lost Pines* have helped me become a better writer, director, and storyteller. I'm still identifying my weaknesses and trying to improve on them, but I came a long way on this project.

I want to finish this report by recognizing all the other people who have helped me make *Lost Pines*. I'm grateful to all my fellow classmates who volunteered their time to help create *Lost Pines*. As I get ready to leave UT and Austin, I keep thinking how thankful I am for our little film community here. This program has been hugely influential on my development as a filmmaker, and the people I met here will be collaborators and friends for life.

## Appendix A: Script

# LOST PINES

Written by

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v.5.6  
December 5, 2012

EXT. LOST PINES FOREST - NIGHT

Lush green pines stretch up into the night.

STEF (O.S.)  
When this is over I hope there's  
nothing left.

STEF (16) lies on the forest floor wearing a black hoodie,  
handkerchief, melancholic glare, drinking off a bottle of  
tequila.

She lights a match and watches it burn.

FAITH (16) rides past her on a rusty yellow bicycle, weaving  
around trees. She tosses a can of NATURAL ICE into the woods.

STEF (CONT'D)  
If one more person asks me if I'm  
evacuating.

FAITH  
God, seriously.

STEF  
I'm gonna stay right here and watch  
this town fucking burn.

Faith cackles, riding circles around Stef.

Stef lights another match.

Somewhere, a fire engine ROARS, SIRENS, HORN blasting.

In the distance, the treeline glows orange. Smoke rises up. A  
large blaze moves slowly closer.

STEF (CONT'D)  
You know what we should do?

FAITH  
What?

STEF  
Anything we goddamn want. You think  
anyone gives a shit about us  
tonight?

FAITH  
That's what I'm talking about!

Faith stops the bike. Shakes a pill out of a bottle, pops it.

STEF  
What's that?

FAITH  
Lucky Charms. Come on.

Faith drops the bike, running through the woods.  
Jumping to her feet, Stef follows.

STEF  
(laughing)  
Girl, wait up! Where we going?

EXT. BASTROP BUS BARN - NIGHT

Faith emerges from the woods, Stef right behind.  
They whirl around busses--  
Holding hands--  
The fire glowing in the distance--

STEF  
I hate this fucking place!

FAITH  
Let's burn it down!

STEF  
Oh my god.

Stef holds up her tequila bottle.

STEF (CONT'D)  
Can we?

FAITH  
It's gonna go up anyway.

Stef grins. She yanks off her handkerchief, stuffs it in the top of the tequila bottle.

Produces her matches.

Faith, squealing with delight, stands back fifteen feet.

Stef lights a match, but holding it up to the bottle, doubt flickers.

STEF  
Sure about this?

FAITH  
Fuckin' DO IT!

MALE VOICE (O.S.)  
Hey!

RICHARD CAVELL (42, weasly in glasses) is pulling band equipment off a bus four rows down.

He drops a sax case and approaches them.

Stef jumps to her feet, blowing out the match.

STEF  
Mr. Cavell?

FAITH  
What are you doing here?

Cavell takes Faith firmly by the arm.

CAVELL  
Question is, what are you doing here -- with *her*?

He pulls out his cell phone with his free hand.

CAVELL (CONT'D)  
I'm calling the cops.

Faith looks at Stef.

FAITH  
Go.

STEF  
No!

CAVELL  
Don't even think about it.

He puts the phone to his ear.

FAITH  
Run!

Stef, moving fast, lights a match, puts it to the end of the handkerchief--

Throws the bottle hard between her and Cavell and Faith--

FWOOM.

It EXPLODES in flame--

Cavell jumps away from the fire, falling backward--

Faith sprints past him--

Stef stares at her explosion, eyes wide--

FAITH (CONT'D)  
You did it!

Squealing with laughter, Faith grasps Stef's hand--

Kisses her hard.

FAITH (CONT'D)  
Come on!

Faith runs down an aisle of busses, Stef grinning, follows--

EXT. BASTROP HIGHWAY - NIGHT

Faith and Stef run past the highway.

A police SUV screams in the other direction, lights, sirens.

The driver, OFFICER ELLISON, smoking a cigarette, makes eye contact with Stef.

The eye contact holds until he passes.

As the sirens fade we--

CUT TO BLACK.

INT. VISITING ROOM - STATE JUVENILE FACILITY - DAY

Stef wears gray scrubs. She looks thinner, her hair cut short. She sits, scowling, at a table.

She takes a sip from a styrofoam cup of coffee, scowls harder, spits it slowly back into the cup.

Title: ONE YEAR LATER.

The door swings open. ELLISON enters on his cell phone.

ELLISON  
(on phone:)  
Yessir. Doing everything I can.

Ellison digs into his pocket and flips a small white pill onto the metal table between them.

OXY.

ELLISON (CONT'D)

(on phone:)

I understand that a hundred percent, but with respect, sir, you're just going to have to trust me.

He hangs up, looks at Stef.

STEF

What?

ELLISON

Know what that is?

STEF

Lucky Charms.

(off Ellison's look:)

What about it?

ELLISON

Know who deals it?

STEF

No.

ELLISON

Know who uses it?

This stops her. She does.

STEF

You got a cigarette?

ELLISON

I quit.

(then:)

We've been seeing a boom in Oxy in Bastrop County. There's a new dealer in town.

STEF

(hands up:)

You caught me.

ELLISON

The stuff's been working its way through the high school lacrosse team. Pulled this one off Heidi Jo Winston.



STEF  
Heidi Jo Winston's a bitch.

ELLISON  
I did notice that.

Ellison smiles.

ELLISON (CONT'D)  
Get us the name of her dealer and  
you get to knock off the rest of  
your sentence.

STEF  
Heidi Jo's not gonna talk to me.

ELLISON  
No. But her teammate will.  
(pause)  
Faith Saunders.

Stef snorts.

STEF  
Playing lacrosse? I don't think so.

ELLISON  
You've been in here now, what, a  
year? How many times has she  
visited you?

Stef thinks.

STEF  
I won't do anything to hurt her.

ELLISON  
We don't want users. Dealers only.  
(then, genuine:)  
She needs your help.

STEF  
She make Varsity?

Ellison smiles.

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD BLEACHERS - DAY

HORNS. SNARE. BRASS. A high school marching band practices on  
the football field. They're led with gusto by CAVELL.

Stef stands in the bleachers, watching them. Waiting.

A few cars pull into the parking lot and a crowd of TEENAGE LACROSSE PLAYERS pile out carrying gym bags and equipment.

No Faith.

The players reach the field and begin to stretch.

Stef climbs off the hill and heads toward them.

EXT. BASTROP HIGH SPORTS FIELD - MOMENTS LATER

As Stef nears the lacrosse players, they start to notice her.

LACROSSE PLAYERS  
Oh my god. / That chick. / Didn't  
she go to prison or something?

Stef ignores the others, walking right up to HEIDI JO (17, popular), pulling her away.

HEIDI JO  
Okay, I'm coming, gosh!

EXT. UNDER THE BLEACHERS - MOMENTS LATER

In the shadows of the bleachers, Stef releases Heidi Jo.

STEF  
I'm looking for Faith.

HEIDI JO  
I don't know where she is.

STEF  
Don't bullshit me, Heidi Jo. I know  
she joined your little team or  
whatever.

The team watches them through the slats of the bleachers.

HEIDI JO  
You don't have to be a B about it.  
She wasn't in school today.

STEF  
I just want to talk to her.

HEIDI JO  
I can't make her do anything she  
doesn't want to.

STEF  
I thought you guys were friends.

HEIDI JO  
Best.

Stef pops Heidi Jo on the nose. Hard. She doubles over.

LACROSSE PLAYERS  
Oooh!

STEF  
Tell her best friends stick up for  
each other. She can find me on Big  
West Road.

Through the slats, Stef sees the lacrosse players pointing  
her out to CAVELL, who runs across the field at her.

EXT. PARKING LOT - A LITTLE LATER

Stef sits on a curb, waiting.

Behind her, Cavell leans against the school wall.

CAVELL  
This is the second time I've called  
the cops on you this year. My  
money's on a hat trick.

Stef rolls her eyes.

Ellison pulls his Cruiser into the lot.

ELLISON  
(to Stef)  
Let's go.

CAVELL  
Officer. I can give a statement if  
you need.

ELLISON  
We're good. Thanks for calling.

Cavell frowns as they pull away.

EXT. ELLISON'S CRUISER - DAY

CRUNCH. Tires pull to a stop in a gravel parking lot.

STEF (O.S.)  
You said yourself she was a bitch.

INT. ELLISON'S CRUISER - DAY

Ellison nervously pops a Nicorette.

ELLISON  
That's not the way we do things. If  
you want this to work, you need to  
get yourself under control.

STEF  
It'll work. Watch, Faith'll come to  
me, now.

Ellison glances at her, impressed.

ELLISON  
If that's true, we're gonna do this  
right.

He tosses a small plastic case onto her lap.

EXT. BURNT GAS STATION - DAY

An old gas station reduced to charcoal and ash. Only the sign  
remains.

Stef sits on the curb, fiddling with a hole her jeans.

A noise. She looks up. FAITH.

She looks different. Wearing a skirt, a letterman jacket, her  
hair long and curled. She looks *popular*.

She has the yellow bike.

FAITH  
You broke her nose. But they say  
she'll be able to play on Friday.

STEF  
That's a relief.

FAITH  
Brought you your bike. It's still a  
piece of shit.

Faith lays the bike down and sits next to her.

STEF  
You still take it out to Lost  
Pines?

FAITH  
Not since you went in. Hey, aren't  
you out early? How'd you swing  
that?

STEF  
Good behavior.  
(off Faith's look:)  
What?

They laugh.

STEF (CONT'D)  
You coulda visited me.

FAITH  
I know. Lot's changed.

STEF  
I haven't.

FAITH  
Look around, Stef. This is how it  
is now.

STEF  
How it is is I found out you're on  
the fucking *lacrosse* team.

Faith doesn't answer.

STEF (CONT'D)  
I'm sorry.  
(then:)  
I just-- I missed you.

FAITH  
I missed you, too.

They share a moment. The tension grows. Will they kiss?

FAITH (CONT'D)  
So you should come see us play  
sometime.

Stef deflates.

STEF  
Yeah, yeah definitely.

FAITH  
Cool.

Stef lowers her voice:

STEF  
Hey, look. You still got those  
Lucky Charms?

FAITH  
Why?

STEF  
Maybe I need some luck, too.

Faith's demeanor changes. She takes Stef's hand as she looks  
at her firmly.

FAITH  
I don't want you hanging around  
anymore.

STEF  
What?

FAITH  
I want you to leave me alone.  
(then:)  
I know what you thought, but we  
were never together.

Stef, gutted.

STEF  
We were always together.

Faith stands.

FAITH  
This year's been good for me. Don't  
come back here and screw it all up.

Faith leaves.

Stef watches her go, her breath catching in her throat.

Once she's out of eyesight, Stef reaches under her shirt,  
yanks off a wire that was taped underneath.

STEF  
Fuck.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - NIGHT

Stef pedals hard down the block on her bike.

She wipes away tears streaming down her face--

Buckling down, riding harder--

She turns wide onto another street--

Headlights blind her as she swerves out of oncoming traffic--

She goes down--

Her bike skidding away.

Gingerly, she stands up, gets her bike.

As she pulls it upright, something catches her eye--

There, stuck in the wheelwell--

BURNT PINE NEEDLES.

Stef pulls one out.

Holy shit.

EXT. VARIOUS STREETS - DOWNTOWN BASTROP - NIGHT

Stef rides her bike hard through dark downtown streets.

She passes Maxine's Cafe as the lights on the sign flick off.

She cruises past the empty Sports Field.

She rides past the Bus Barn, her eyes glancing over the rows of dark buses.

EXT. LOST PINES - NIGHT

Stef rides through the forest, weaving around burnt trees--

Ducking under blackened branches--

Crushing burnt pine needles--

CRUNCH--

She pulls to a stop.

She picks up a burnt can of NATURAL ICE.

She throws it aside. Looking around.  
 Ahead, something glints in the moonlight. She squints.  
 A TRAILER.  
 She kicks off.

EXT. LOST PINES - TRAILER - NIGHT  
 Stef drops the bike and approaches.  
 The lights glow inside.  
 Carefully, she tries the door.  
 It opens.

INT. TRAILER - NIGHT  
 Faith sits at the kitchenette table in a thin tank top.  
 A Lucky Charms box upended on the table. Little white pills  
 scattered across it.  
 Stef glances around, then comes in.

STEF  
 Faith.

Faith looks up, her eyes slow to focus. She's stoned.

STEF (CONT'D)  
 What are you doing here?

FAITH  
 I'm working.

Faith counts pills into baggies.  
 Stef crouches next to her, putting her hand over Faith's.

STEF  
 Stop. Let's go.

Faith shakes her off and keeps working.

STEF (CONT'D)  
 Faith. Please. Listen to me--  
 (beat)  
 I love you.



As she says it, the door opens.

It's CAVELL. Surprised as hell to see her.

Stef scrambles to her feet as Cavell pulls a .358 out of his waistband and points it at her.

STEF (CONT'D)

Cavell.

Cavell enters the trailer and closes the door behind him.

CAVELL

So, what. You fancy yourself a detective, now? Save your little girlfriend?

Cavell beckons to Faith. Slowly, she stands up and joins him.

He kisses her.

The bottom falls out of Stef's stomach.

CAVELL (CONT'D)

You still got a lot to learn.

(to Faith:)

Say goodbye to your friend, Faith.

FAITH

(whispered)

Goodbye.

CAVELL

Like you mean it.

Cavell shoves Faith into Stef. They hug.

Stiffly at first, then, slowly, Faith melts into Stef's arms.

Stef hugs her tighter.

CAVELL (CONT'D)

That's more like it. You like that, Stef? You miss that? It's mine now.

Faith's hands cross behind Stef's back, grazing against--

THE WIRE.

They share a look.

CAVELL (CONT'D)

Enough. That's disgusting.

Cavell grabs Stef by her handkerchief, gagging her with it, yanking her off Faith.

He seats her at the table.

CAVELL (CONT'D)  
 Let's do this.  
 (picking up a pill:)  
 Ever take one of these, Stef?  
 Amazing feeling. Gets you all  
 slippery. You can get knocked  
 across the face with a lacrosse  
 stick, come up laughing. People  
 love it.  
 (handing Faith a rope:)  
 Tie her up.

Faith hesitates, but she takes the rope and ties Stef's hands behind her back, then slinks back.

Cavell holds up two Oxy pills.

CAVELL (CONT'D)  
 Take two, it's even better. Float  
 above the trees.

Cavell pulls out the gag--

STEF  
 Lost Pines, Harmon--

Cavell drops the pills in, slams his palm over her mouth.

CAVELL  
 Shh.  
 (picking up more pills)  
 Now, you take four, you're gonna  
 forget where you put your feet last  
 night. And if you take eight...  
 (adding more)  
 Well, you'll have to tell me.

Pries her mouth open--

STEF  
 Faith!

Faith's face contorted--

Cavell slips the pills in, clasps Stef's mouth closed--

Stef struggles against his grip--

Pleading with her eyes at Faith--

FAITH  
She's at Lost Pines. Power Easement  
off Harmon Road.

CAVELL  
What?

In the distance: SIRENS.

Cavell pulls aside Stef's shirt, revealing the wire--

CAVELL (CONT'D)  
Bitch!

He whips the .358 up at Faith--

Stef's up like a bolt, shoving the gun up--

BANG!

It goes off into the ceiling--

Faith pushes out the door, running--

Stef spits pills out--

Cavell swings at Stef's jaw--

She stumbles back against the kitchenette--

He lowers his gun at her--

She grasps around the table, her fingers finding a pan--

She swings, connects with his head--

CLING.

He collapses--

Stef's out the door.

EXT. LOST PINES - TRAILER - NIGHT

Stef SLAMS the door closed to the trailer.

Stuffs an axe through the handle.

The SIRENS get closer.

She looks around. Clocks a propane tank under the trailer.

She pulls off her handkerchief--

Stuffs it into the top of the tank--

Pulls out the matches--

Strikes one. It doesn't light.

The SIRENS on top of her now--

HEADLIGHTS--

Ellison jumps out, his gun drawn.

ELLISON

Hey, hey, hey, Stef! Put the  
matches down!

Stef strikes the match again. It doesn't light.

ELLISON (CONT'D)

I'm serious!

Faith comes out of the shadows.

FAITH

Stef.

Stef looks her in the eye--

Strikes the match--

WHOOSH.

It lights.

FAITH (CONT'D)

I'm sorry.

The match burns.

STEF

Are you?

FAITH

Yes. We were always together.

Stef looks at her. Raises the match.

Blows it out.

BANG.

Blood bursts from Stef's shoulder. She falls back.

Ellison spins to the sound--

BOOM. Fires--

Cavell, leaning out an open trailer window, drops lifeless.  
His gun slipping from his fingers.

FAITH (CONT'D)

Stef!

She runs to Stef, kneeling by her.

Ellison kneels on the other side.

ELLISON

You're gonna be okay. You did good.

He whips off his jacket, pressing it against her wound.

ELLISON (CONT'D)

Shit, you're gonna make detective  
before I do.

STEF

I'm not a cop.

ELLISON

Not yet.

(to Faith:)

Hold this. Hard.

Faith takes the jacket. Ellison rises, pulling out his  
walkie.

ELLISON (CONT'D)

(in background:)

I need an ambulance right away.  
Lost Pines. Gunshots...

Stef and Faith alone.

Faith takes her hand. Squeezes.

Stef looks back a moment. Then squeezes back.

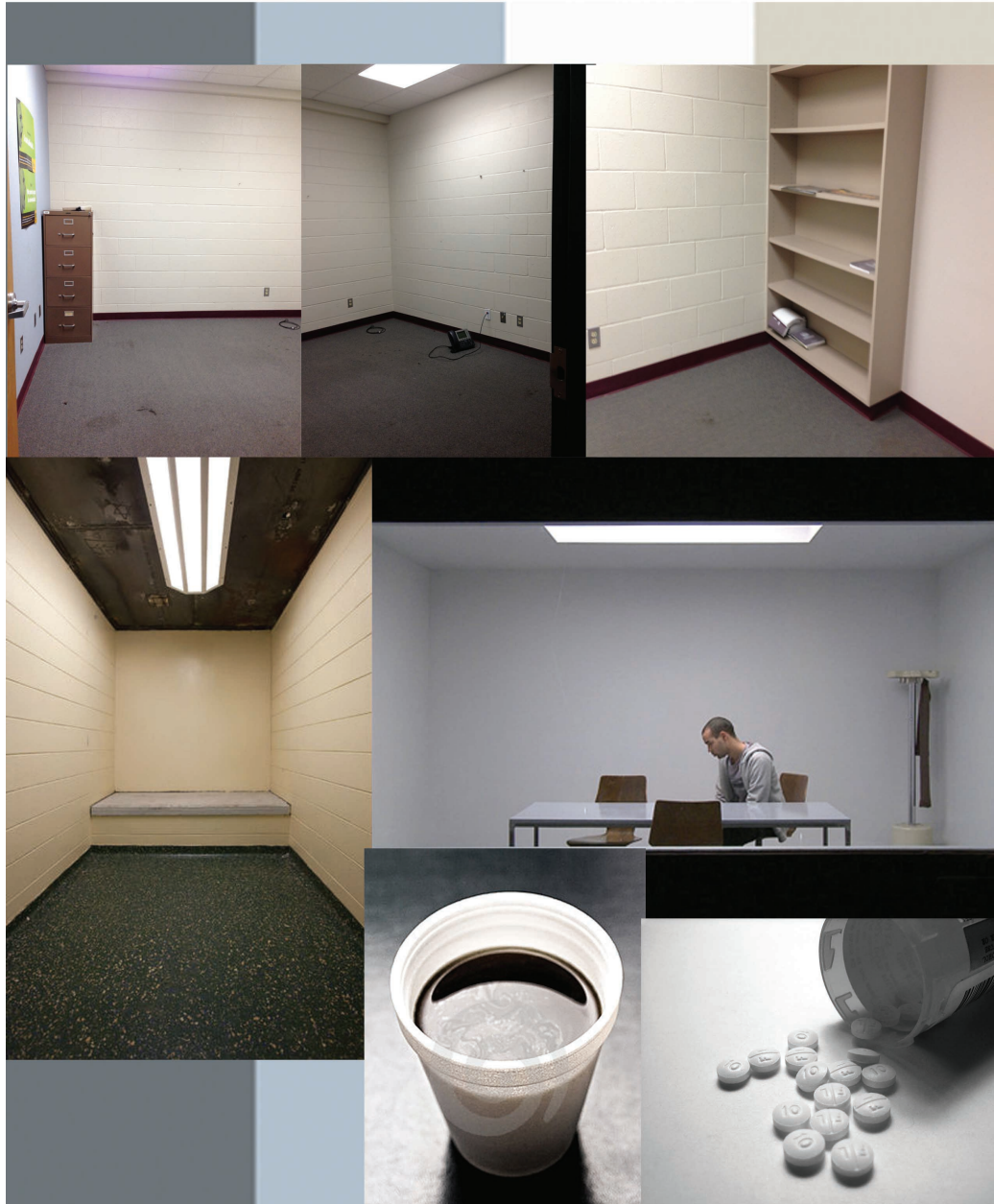
CUT TO BLACK.

## **Appendix B: Production Design Lookbook**

My production designer, Claire White, put the following images together as initial ideas for the look of the sets and locations of the film. The yellow bike, the blue handkerchief, and the drug trailer were iconic items we wanted to stand out. These are her first ideas about what those items might look like. They were all pretty close to what they looked like in the final film.

## Juvenile Facility

Sterile, grey/white/blue tones contrast richer tones of outdoor scenes. Feeling of confinement. Minimal visual elements



*Lookbook for the juvenile detention facility.*

## Trailer Interior

Dingy, dated, worn. Muted colors and dark accents to create ominous feeling

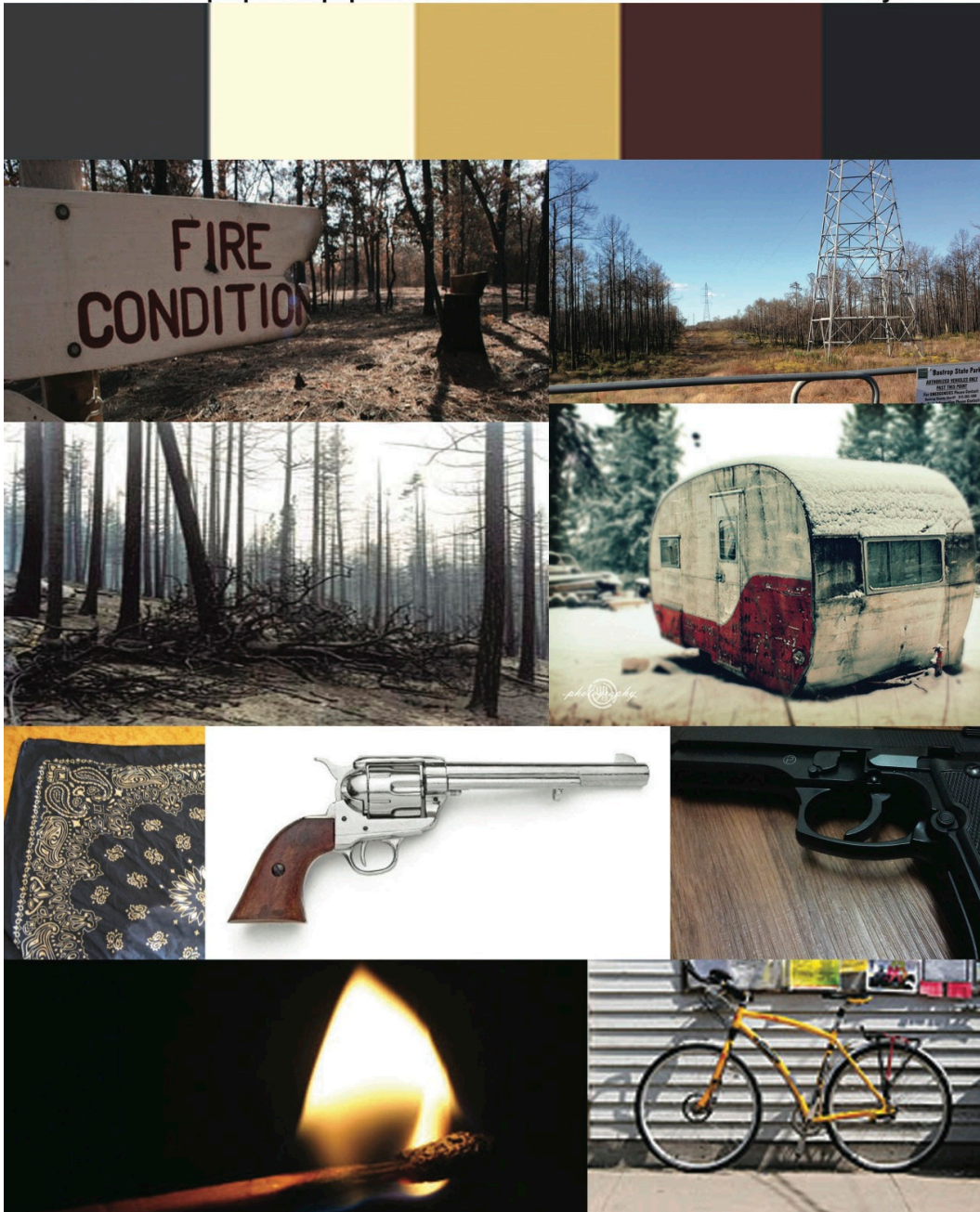


*Lookbook for the trailer and interiors.*



## Trailer Exterior

Distinctive props and pops of color to contrast burned and charred scenery.



*Lookbook for exteriors and iconic images.*

## **Appendix C: Visual References**

The following images are stills from my reference movies, with comparisons to stills from *Lost Pines*. These images from *All the President's Men*, *The Parallax View*, *Snow Angels*, and *Jaws* represent the look I was going for in terms of lighting, framing, color, and tone. Most of these photos are referred to specifically in the Visual References chapter of the thesis report.



*The night exteriors in Buffy the Vampire Slayer are too bright and composed for what we wanted to do in Lost Pines.*



*The shadowy look of the night scenes in All the President's Men were much more suspenseful and rooted in realism.*



*A comparison between lighting in night scenes in All the President's Men and Lost Pines.*





*Rob Bowman, Director on The X-Files, was famous for going around the set and turning off lights. The image below is from Lost Pines. I was inspired by The X-Files to use shadow and darkness to create suspense.*



*The extreme wide shot of Warren Beatty in The Parallax View was a style we wanted to use. In All the President's Men, it's used to show the protagonists up against a seemingly insurmountable system.*



*We used extreme wides in several places in Lost Pines to show the breadth of space and size of the odds against Stef.*



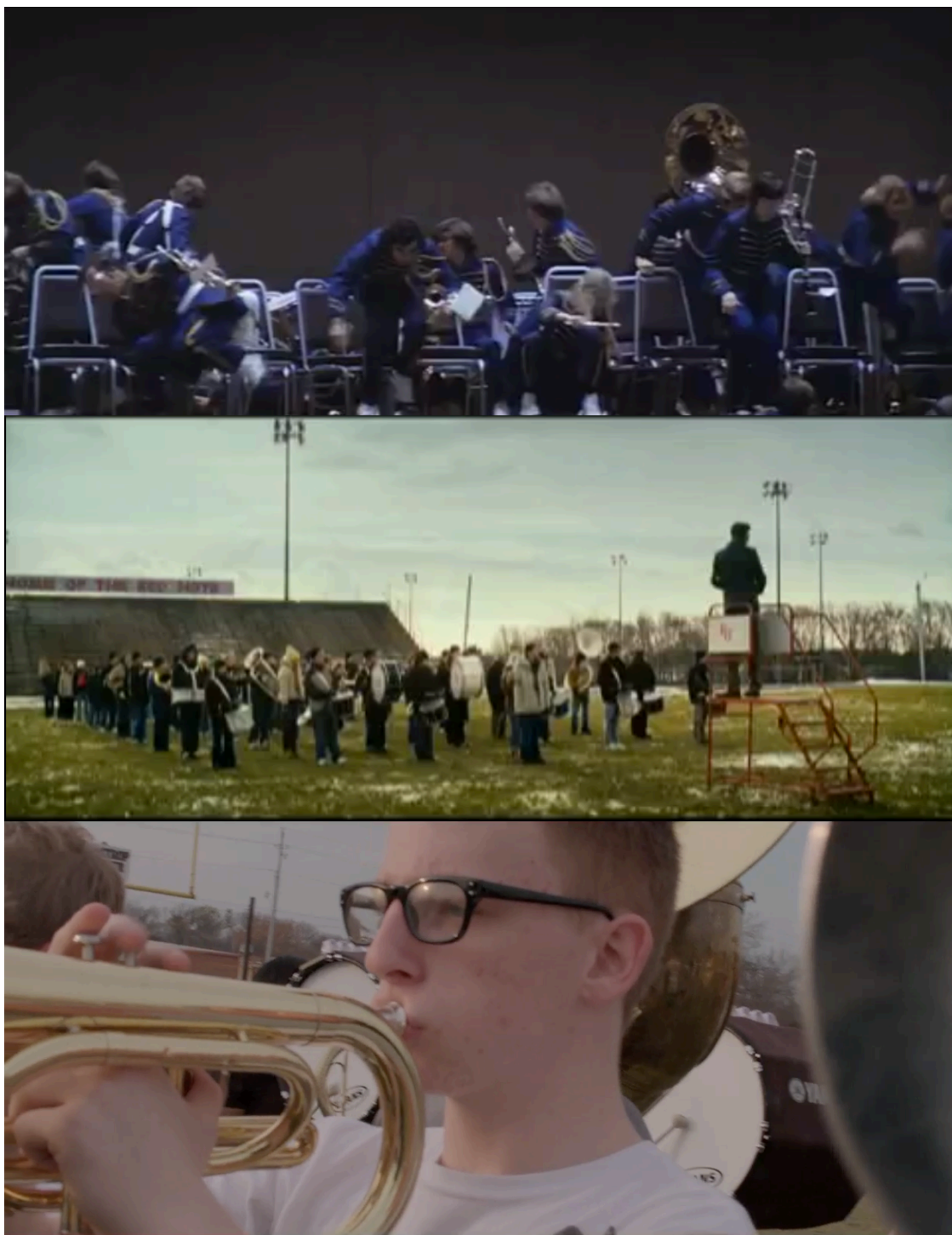


*Quint tells Hooper and Brody the story of the U.S.S. Indianapolis in Jaws.*



*Cavell taunts Stef inside the trailer in Lost Pines. Both scenes are lit by practical bulbs and, in the case of Lost Pines, candles.*





*The marching band sequences in The Parallax View and Snow Angels inspired the marching band in Lost Pines.*



*A visual reference from Snow Angels, and a still from Lost Pines.*

## **Appendix D: Inspiration Images**

In my initial emails with Director of Photography Patrick Smith, I shared images from some of the film and television I had been watching, as well as photos I had come across on the internet that seemed to capture Stef's attitude and the feel of the film. I've included some of those original images here. These were some of the earliest ideas for the film. We later made choices that veered away from some of these images, but they're interesting artifacts of where the story started.



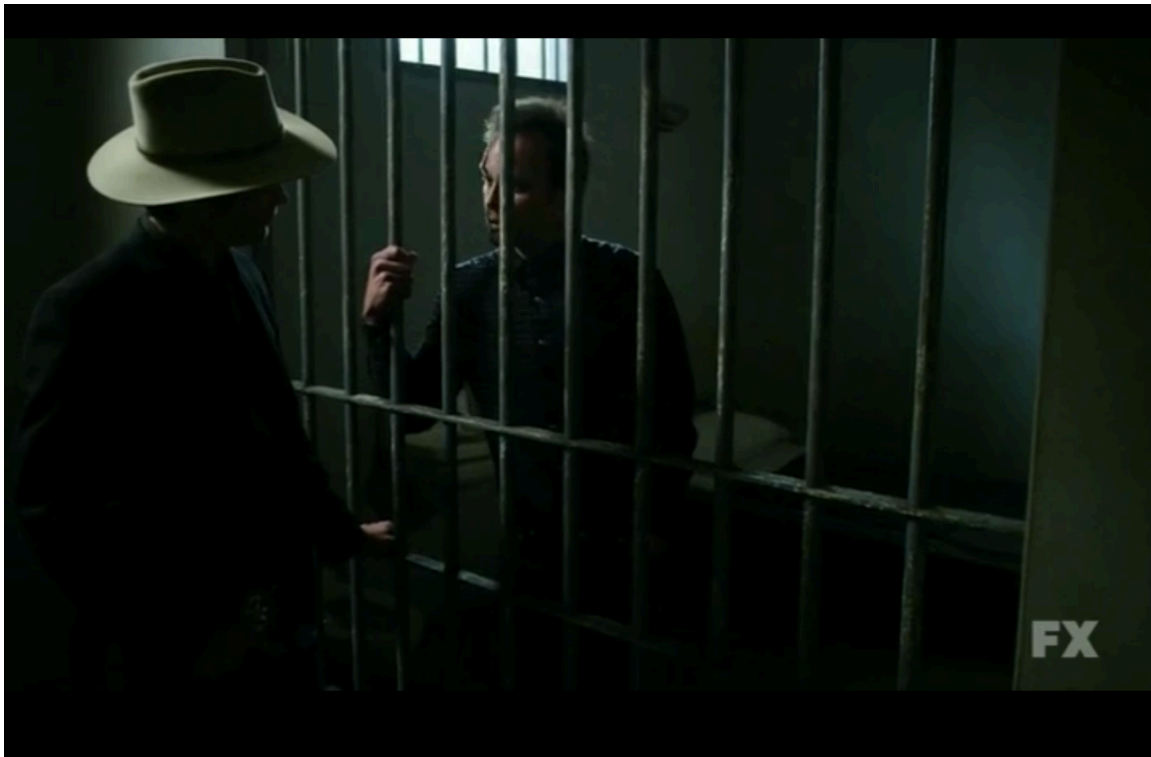


*The Bastrop wildfire left trees standing, but destroyed everything in between. Erie sight.*





*The bold, dangerous mysteries in FX's Justified were part of what initially excited me about making a detective story.*



*In Justified, Raylan Givens is strong, violent, and good. I wanted to explore those characteristics in a female teenage detective.*



*These images were early ideas of what Stef might look like, from the high school imagery to the disaffected slouch.*

## **Vita**

Britta Lundin was born in Reno, Nevada, where she first started getting interested in the themes of heartache, longing, and mystery. She grew up in the small coastal town of Astoria, Oregon. She attended Reed College in Portland, Oregon, where she got her degree in Political Science, studying political party identification among young voters. She watched free cinema and sold movie tickets at the Neptune Theater in Seattle before moving to Austin to attend the University of Texas at Austin for Film Production. Her work has screened at the Maryland Film Festival, Frameline Film Festival, Dallas International Film Festival, and Austin Film Festival, among others. She will soon live in Los Angeles, where there's heartache, longing, and mystery around every corner.

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